

June 20, 2003

OBSERVER Magazine

Dhaka, the Capital of Islamic Culture

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Published in *Observer Magazine* (Bangladesh), June 20, 2003, Page: 7-9

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Dhaka is located on the northern bank of river Buriganga, which is about 26 miles in length. Through the river Buriganga, Dhaka is connected by water with the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna and their innumerable tributaries. The city of Dhaka, which lies in 23° 43' N. Latitude and 90° 24' E longitude, is well protected from natural calamities. The Portuguese writer Joao De Barros found Dhaka prominent enough to be inserted in his map drawn in 1550 A.D.

Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh has a fairly long history. In the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Muslims established their rule in northern Bengal. In the seventies of the same century, a governor of the Muslim ruler Mughisuddin Tughril appears to have made advance into Dhaka region and established his rule. The Mughals made Dhaka the provincial capital of Bengal in 1610 A.D. and it remained so till the second decade of the 18th century. Dhaka once again became the provincial capital of East Bengal and Assam in 1905 but with the dissolution of the province in 1911, Dhaka once again became a divisional head-quarter. With the creation of Pakistan in 1947 Dhaka became the provincial capital of East Pakistan, and in 1971 when Bangladesh became an independent and sovereign state, Dhaka became the capital of the country.

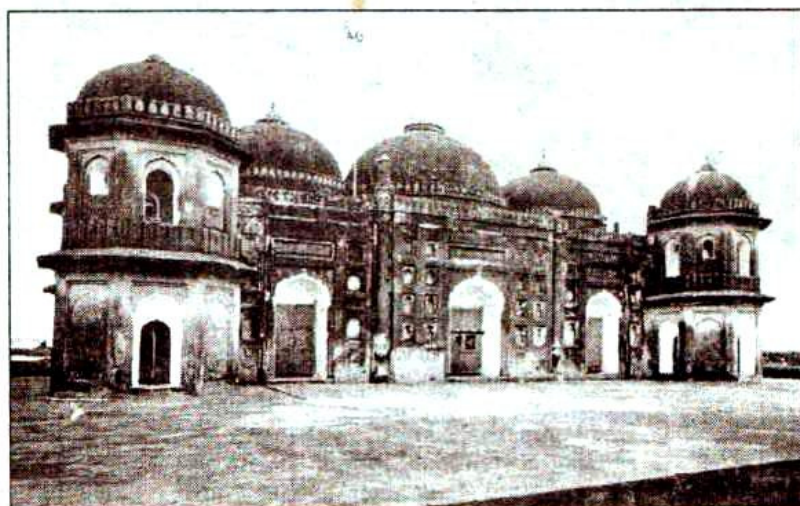
Dhaka came into lime-light of history even during pre-Mughal days, that is in the Sultanate period as attested by a number of architectural monuments, particularly mosques, fountains, gateways, etc. Some of the pre-Mughal edifices have defied the onslaught of time and testify to the growing Muslim population. These are the mosque of Binat Bibi (1457AD) at Narinda, and the mosque and gateway (1459

AD) at Nasrwalagali as well as the old fort in the Central Jail compound.

The Mughals who made Dhaka the capital of the Bengal province erected a number of edifices. In 1645, Mir Abul Kashim, Diwan of Shah Suja built a spacious building which goes by the name Bara Katra. He also built an Idgah on the spacious plain to the north of peelkhana on the way to Satmasjid at Jafarabad.



Lalbagh Fort Mosque (1679 A.D.)



Sat Gambuz Mosque at Jafarabad (1680 A.D.)

Subadar Mir Jumla's (1660-63) name is connected with a number of constructions. He built a gate called Bagh-i-Badshahi. The gate was probably meant to guard the city from the north. The next Subadar, Shaista Khan (1664-88) was also a great builder. He built a number of

mosques and tombs. Of the mosques-Chaukbazar mosque, Babubazar mosque, Sat Gumbad mosque, Kawran Bazar Khwaja Ambar's mosque are prominent. One of the finest examples of Shaista Khan's unstilted patronage towards the development of religious architecture was the mosque at Lalbagh erected in 1678-79. Mughal Deputy governor Farrukh Siyar also built a mosque at Lalbagh, known as Farrukh Siyar's mosque, in the second decade of the 18th century. One of the landmarks of the present day Dhaka is the Bait-ul-Mukarram mosque, the national mosque of Bangladesh, built in 1960. It covers a floor space of 60,000 sq. ft. Founded on a podium, it is ambitiously planned, modeled on the Holy Ka'ba, but demonstrating many interesting features of Indo-

Islamic architecture. Dhaka is thus rightly called the city of mosques from ancient times due to innumerable mosques built in every part of the city.

Of the forts built by Muslim rulers, Lalbagh fort built by the Mughals is the finest. It is not a military fort as such but a palace fortress fortified for defensive purpose. Several audience halls and bathhouses called Hammam Khanas also represent Mughal architecture of Dhaka city. The most interesting edifice of which is the audience halls and Hammam Khana at Lalbagh fort.

In course of time some beautiful Islamic calligraphy specimen have been produced in Dhaka. The art of Islamic calligraphy originally arose from the necessity to give clear and artistic expression to the word of the Holy Quran. The art of calligraphy in Bangladesh is of such excellence and skill that it can rightly claim to have a most coveted place in the Islamic world. As is well known from numerous specimens, calligraphy was not confined to manuscripts alone but was employed on buildings, coins, fabrics and

objects of all conceivable kinds. From the point of view of artistic consideration, the most remarkable and amazing development in calligraphy is the Tugra style of Bangladesh. The earliest Arabic calligraphy specimen is the stone inscription from Sitalmath, Rajshahi, dated 1254

A.D., which is now in the collection of the Bangladesh National Museum. Besides the Holy Quran, many other important manuscripts are preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka. Among them may be mentioned a holograph manuscript of Sharh-i-Rubaiyat of poet Jami copied in Nastaliq in 1477 A.D., Makhzan-ul-Asrar of poet Nizami copied in Nastaliq in 1513 A.D., Shahnamah of Firdausi copied and illustrated in 1599 A.D., Akbarnamah of Abul Fazal copied in Naskh in 1641 A.D., and the Fatwa-i-Alamgiri copied in Naskh in 1827 A.D.

Metal work has always enjoyed a prestigious position in the Islamic art heritage of Bangladesh. It appears that brass was a popular medium of metal work that demonstrated adornment of at least five main traps- engraving, inaly, filigree, repousse and casting. A large number of metal work specimen are now preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum and other museums of Bangladesh.

Weapons of cast iron or bronze are noteworthy examples of metal works. The big cannon of Mughal Governor Mir Jumla is own placed at the south gate of General Osmani Park, Dhaka. There are quite a good number of cannons in the Bangladesh National Museum. Among them, several pieces belonged to Emperor Sher Shah (1540-45 A.D.)

Of all the metal works patronized by the Muslims of Bangladesh, the most delicate and refined is the filigree works of gold and silver. Dhaka is particularly famous for a superior type of filigree work, called Mandila. The Bangladesh National Museum has quite a rich collection of silver filigree works. Important among them are some Atardan & Golabpash, a model of Ahsan Manzil palace and a model of Hussani Dalan of Dhaka.

Coins were struck in Bangladesh from the early period of Muslim rule in gold, silver and copper. It was also ornamented with calligraphy, a typical practice of Islam. There was a mint in the old fort of Dhaka that produced huge number of coins in Mughal period. At the National

Museum of Dhaka there are quite a large collection of silver, gold and copper coins of medieval Muslim rulers of India.

Since ancient times Dhaka is also historically known for its fine and superfine quality of cotton textiles. These goods found a prominent place in Bengal's trade with outside world during the Mughal period. The finest cotton cloth called muslin was manufactured at Dhaka and its adjoining areas both by

or embroidered quilt. Each Kantha is an individual creation reflecting the vision and skill of a village woman. Nakshi Kantha has its various uses. The kantha, which is used for wrapping the Holy Quran, is called gilaf. The Bangladesh National Museum has over one thousand pieces of Nakshi Kantha representing the folk art heritage of textiles in Bangladesh.

During Mughal period there was patronization of madrasa and maktab

by the government for Islamic teaching in Dhaka. Maulavi Asadullah (died 1750) a renewed scholar used to teach students logic, philosophy and Islamic jurisprudence in Arabic and Persian in the Lalbagh Mosque. After the collapse of Muslim political power in 1757, the mosques served as maktab and madrasa. A modern Islamic teaching institute, Dhaka Madrasa was started in 1873 with the financial support and endowment of Hazi Muhammad Mohsin of Hugli. Maulana Obeidullah-al-Obeidi (1834-85), a reputed scholar, was its first principal. The madrasa had an English department to start with from which students could sit for Entrance Examination of Calcutta University. In 1919, Arabic-Persian Department of Dhaka Madrasa shifted to the Alia Madrasa at Bakhshibazar and English Department became the Islamic Intermediate College, now Kabi Nazrul College. Besides, Dhaka Madrasa, some secular higher educational institutes were also established in Dhaka in the 19th century among which Dhaka College and Jagan-nath College are mention-able.

The annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911 came as a great shock to the Muslim community. The Viceroy Lord Hardinge, came to Dhaka in January 1912 and announced the decision to establish a university at Dhaka. The Muslims wanted the university to have jurisdiction over the whole of East Bengal and to be both a residential and affiliating university. The University ultimately came into being in 1921. From the beginning, the University of Dhaka had departments of Arabic and Islamic Studies. At the end of 1940's, the Department of Islamic His-



Tomb of Pari Bibi at Lalbagh Fort.



Bait-ul-Mukarram Mosque (1960 A.D.)

Hindu and Muslim weavers. To procure the finest muslin for the Emperor of Delhi and the Nawabs of Bengal, the Mughal government appointed officials in factories to ensure their quality. Many poetic names have been given to various cotton manufactures denoting their great beauty and delicacy. The embroidered cloth of Dhaka called Jamdani is still woven by few weavers.

Dhaka was also known for its Kasida and chikan embroideries. But the most widely acclaimed embroidery of Bangladesh is known as Nakshi Kantha

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tory and Culture was also set up.

In the early seventeenth century, Mughal Governor Islam Khan is reported to have maintained twelve hundred musicians and dancing girls for official entertainment. From 1875 till the end of nineteenth century, every year in January, dancing girls and musicians displayed their skill at Shahbagh under the patronage of the Nawabs of Dhaka. Nawab Sir. Khwaja Ahsanullah was a great musician and specialized in harmonium. He wrote some dramas and got these staged in various theatre halls of Dhaka. Imam Bakhsh, Muhammad Khan, Mir Ali Mehdi, Mithan Khan distinguished themselves in the Kheyal form of music. Presently, we have a performing arts academy, called Shilpakala Academy in Dhaka. Besides there is a Public Library, National Book Centre, Bangla

Academy, Nazrul Institute and some museums both in the public and private sector which are preserving the history and heritage of the region.

The festival of Muharram was observed in Dhaka. A number of Hussaini Dalans existed in the city of which the oldest one is known as Bibi-ka-Rauza. The Hussaini Dalan, which has been the focus of the city's Muharram observance, is situated at Bakhsibazar. Immediately after sighting the Muharram moon, naubat is played at the main gateway of the Hussaini Dalan. Congregation is held during the first three days of Muharram, the niches of the Dalan are then illuminated with profusion of candles. In the midnight of ninth-tenth, the Muharram procession originates from Husaini Dalan and return to its place of origin after having traversed several miles through the city.

The development of the city of Dhaka as a centre of culture and administration is particularly marked after 1947 with the establishment of Pakistan. It was turned into the provincial capital of East Pakistan. Henceforth, Dhaka not only became the administrative head, quarters of a new province but also the seat of Legislative Assembly of East Pakistan. The state of Pakistan, however, did not last long. On 16 December 1971, East Pakistan became an independent and sovereign state. As capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka's ascendancy became supreme not only in the field of politics but also in the field of social, economic, educational, administrative and cultural arena.

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